

August 5, 2018 – Exodus 16:2-15, John 6:22-35

God will provide. It's something that Christians say to one another on a regular basis. God will provide.

You've lost your job. God will provide. You're in a car accident. God will provide. You're struggling to make ends meet. God will provide.

And it's true. We as Lutherans confess it as part of our core confession. Luther writes in his explanation of the First Article of the Creed:

“I believe that God has made me and all creatures; that He has given me my body and soul, eyes, ears, and all my members, my reason and all my senses, and still takes care of them. He also gives me clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have. He richly and daily provides me with all that I need to support this body and life.”

He does it again in his explanation to the Fourth Petition of the Lord's Prayer: “Daily bread includes everything that has to do with the support and needs of the body, such as food, drink, clothing, shoes, house, home, land, animals, money, goods, a devout husband or wife, devout children, devout workers, devout and faithful rulers, good government, good weather, peace, health, self-control, good reputation, good friends, faithful neighbors, and the like.”

God will provide. God is providing. God has always provided. But Luther also points out something in that same explanation that makes us a little more uncomfortable. He says, “God certainly gives daily bread to everyone without our prayers, even to all evil people.”

Now, that's something that we really don't like to hear. God provides for us whether we pray for it or not. God provides even to evil people. That turns everything upside-down.

Because, if that's true, then what's the point in saying, “God will provide”? What's the point in having faith in Jesus Christ? What's the point in believing that there's a God at all?

And it IS true. We see it every day. Turn on the news and you'll see crooks in public office. You'll see criminals who are CEO's. You'll see rapists and drug dealers and criminals making millions playing for your favorite sports team.

God will provide. Even to all evil people. Which is why Luther finishes that statement by saying, “but we pray in this petition that God would lead us to realize this and to receive our daily bread with thanksgiving.”

That is why it's good to say, “God will provide.” Because it's not just a statement of fact. It's a statement of thanksgiving. Something we should do on a regular basis.

It is not, however, necessarily something that is all that comforting. Which I think we often forget. To someone who has lost his job or has been in a car accident or who is struggling to make ends meet, saying “God will provide,” may just be a painful reminder of all the other people for whom God has provided.

That's what the Israelites were facing in our Old Testament lesson today. In this lesson, they had just escaped from Egypt. Egypt was a evil place.

They had gone to Egypt when they were just a single family, way back in the days of Joseph. As a way to escape from a famine in Canaan. And at that time, Egypt was paradise for them. Joseph was a high ranking official for Pharaoh. He made sure they were all well-cared for.

But then Joseph died. And that Pharaoh died. And a new Pharaoh arose. And this paradise became hell on earth. The Israelites were forced to become slaves. Who were given backbreaking work and abused and killed. All so that their masters could be fat and lazy and wealthy. So that they could worship false gods in the cities and temples that the Israelites built.

And then God freed them from this slavery. And they thought finally, God will provide. Finally, we will be fat and lazy and wealthy. Finally, we will have the impressive cities and temples. Finally, we will enslave the Egyptians.

But it's nothing like that. They went into the desert and there was nothing waiting for them. No meat. No bread. No money. No cities. Nothing. And they looked behind them and they saw the Egyptians still fat and lazy and wealthy. Still worshiping their false gods.

And they think, "What was the point of all of that? We have less now than we did in Egypt. God hasn't provided anything."

Except that he has. They can't see it through the growling of their bellies. But he has provided so much. He has provided them with freedom. And a home. And a future. He has provided them his own promise that they will be his people and he will be their God.

They can't see it through the growling in their bellies. So he feeds them. It's not a lot. Just enough meat and bread for each day's needs. No more. No less. It's not enough to make them fat and lazy and wealthy. But it's enough so that they can see and hear his Word once again.

Fast-forward about 1500 years and we have the same situation happening all over again. Like Moses standing before Pharaoh, Jesus has come to free his people from sin, death, and the power of the devil. He's teaching them by the Sea of Galilee. Thousand of people, gathered together. And he wants them all to hear of this great freedom they have in him.

But there's a problem. It's gotten late. And the crowd is hungry. They need to leave and go find food for themselves. The disciples are ready to send them away. But Jesus doesn't want them to go. He wants them to stay. To hear his word. So he gives them meat and bread. From two fish and five loaves, he provides enough food so that everyone eats and is satisfied.

But they misunderstand this great miracle that he's done for them. They think he's come to make them fat and lazy and wealthy, like the Roman's who now enslave them. So they chase him down to the other side of the lake. They want more fish and bread. Surely, they think, if this man is from God, he will provide.

And so Jesus responds, "Yes. God does provide. He has provided me. I am the bread of life; whoever comes to me shall not hunger, and whoever believes in me shall never thirst."

That was the point of the manna in the desert. That was the point of Jesus' ministry. That is the point of the Church today. To receive the bread of life. To receive God's Word made flesh. To receive Jesus Christ.

In the Old Testament, God didn't give them as much as the Egyptians had. He gave them just enough so that they could listen to his Word. And believe that God does provide everything we need for body and soul. In the New Testament, Jesus didn't give them as much as the Romans had. He gave them just enough so that they could listen to his Word. And believe that He does provide everything we need for body and soul.

And today, very often, God doesn't give us as much as the politicians or the CEO's or the football players. He gives us just enough so that we can listen to his Word. And believe that He does provide everything we need for body and soul.

He gives us our daily bread. All that we need to support this body and life. That we receive with thanksgiving. Not because the clothing and shoes, food and drink, house and home, wife and children, land, animals, and all I have are the point of these blessings.

They exist only to help me receive the real bread of life in Word and Sacrament. The real bread of life and living water that feeds me so that I never hunger or thirst again. The real bread of life who gave his life that I might live eternally.

And when our daily bread ceases to perform that function. When the the things God gives us to support this body and life become a distraction to believing in Him whom God has sent. Well then, we risk becoming those people in our lessons looking for food that perishes. When we should always be seeking food that endures to eternal life.

Jesus is our bread of life. He has given his very life on the cross that we may never hunger or thirst. So that we may never fear God's wrath or rejection. So that we may be filled with every spiritual blessing until that day when even physical hunger and thirst are no more. When we stand in the glory of a paradise greater than ancient Egypt. Greater than ancient Rome. Greater than any kingdom of this world.

God will provide. God is providing. God has always provided. For the bread of God has come down from heaven and has given his life for the world. Amen.